

# AMAA News

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**Participants in the Celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church of  
Issy-les-Moulineaux (Paris), France.**

## **Church Growth and Armenian “Young People”**

by Peter Kougasian, Esq.



**Editors Note:** Peter Kougasian is an AMAA Board member and an active member of the Armenian Evangelical Church of New York. He is an Assistant District Attorney for New York County District Attorney Robert Morgenthau. Currently he is a Bureau Chief of the office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor of New York City. The following is the text of his message given at the AMAA's 78th Annual Meeting's Mission Conference.

**L**ooking around the sanctuary at a recent AMAA Annual Meeting, I was struck by how rich our church is. And among the greatest of our riches are our *badvelis*. Today, as throughout the 152 years of the Armenian Evangelical Movement, our *badvelis* epitomize our church's Christian dedication, wisdom and scholarship. So we might expect that our churches today would be growing by dramatic leaps; that our most pressing issue would be how to manage growth, not how to inspire it.

And yet, as Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian wrote with admirable candor in his book, *The Armenian Evangelical Church*,

“...the present state of the Armenian Evangelical Church is not enviable or reassuring...In spite of her glorious past, her future is not promising. Many Armenian Evangelical churches, both large and small, have been experiencing declining membership and attendance...The former strong enthusiasm of the Armenian Evangelicals has been dissipated and their great dreams and aspirations dimmed.”

I think we must be challenged by those observations, but not at all discouraged.

To begin with, I think there has scarcely been a time in which thoughtful observers have not been troubled by what they perceived as a dramatic decline in the contemporary church. Badveli Tootikian wrote his evaluation of the church in 1982. Twenty years earlier, in 1962, the great Protestant theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote, “Repeatedly in history the death of the churches has been prophesied.

In 1816 John Keats said about them, ‘They are dying like an outburnt lamp.’”

Let's begin with the assurance that the challenges we face in our times and in our church are not unique.

Indeed, even in the apostles' time, when memories of Jesus were still fresh, the light of the church often seemed to be dimming. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel.” (Galatians 1:6). When we look through history, what is most remarkable about the Church is not that it is impervious to problems. What is remarkable about Christ's church is its inclination to renewal; that it, too, is resurrected.

What can we do, then, in our own time, to renew our church, and to grow our church? Let me share some personal thoughts with you.

I am 42 years old. And the wonderful thing about being Armenian is that, at the age of 42, I am still considered part of the younger generation. In fact, even my parents are considered part of the younger generation — and somewhere, beyond my parents, looms middle age. I am part of that younger generation that must enter our churches if our churches are to grow and thrive.

And yet, in many of our churches this younger generation is conspicuous by its absence. It may seem at times that these young people simply feel nothing in common with the elders of our churches; that they are like the younger generation of Christ's time, who complained to their elders, “We pipe, you do not dance; we wail, you do not mourn.”

Why are these young people not flocking to our churches? We hear it said that this new generation is somehow different from us. The problem, we are sometimes told, is that today's young people were raised in a secular culture on materialis-

tic values, and they have no patience with anything that is spiritual. And so, this argument goes, we have little realistic hope of bringing them into our churches.

I strongly disagree with this argument. To be sure, it is true to this extent: our young people *were* raised in a very secular, very materialistic culture. But those realities only intensify the need for spiritual renewal. And believe me, young people feel that need, or at the very least, feel the agonizing sense that something essential is missing from their lives. In fact, if anything characterizes this younger generation, it is the great lengths to which they will go in search of some spiritual experience. One finds them studying Buddhism, Hinduism, channeling, Yoga, Scientology, runes, numerology, I Ching; the list is endless.

When my wife Beth came back from taking the bar examination, she told me that during a break she went to the ladies' room and overheard a conversation. One young woman, who was taking the bar examination for the second time was wearing a large crystal suspended in a pendant around her neck. And this young woman explained to her friend that she had failed the bar examination the first time because she had inadvertently worn her crystal upside-down, and thereby sent all her energy in the wrong direction.

What are we to make of all this? The philosopher Hegel wrote that the best measure of the profundity of a person's thirst is the brackishness of the water which he is willing to drink. By that measure, I think we can conclude that our young people have a desperate thirst for a real spiritual experience, and that, by and large, they are not finding it.

Why is it that this younger generation, actively searching for spiritual fulfillment, is not, in many instances, finding it at our church?

In answering this question, I have in mind a group of people I read about — people young in heart, at least, if not all in age — who actually belonged to a church, but be-

gan a spiritual journey that led them away from that church. They felt that their church no longer offered them an authentic spiritual experience. They came to the belief that their church was more about secular concerns and formalism than about a direct relationship between God and the believer.

And so, these young people left their church, and started their own. And they called this new church, the Armenian Evangelical Church.

I am speaking, of course, of the forty founders of our church. When I think of the young people of today — the ones that we are trying so urgently to bring back into our church — I am reminded of no one so much as those forty restless and courageous souls. If we take a moment to think about what qualities they brought to this church in founding it, I think we will identify precisely those qualities which will bring our own generation back to our church.

**First**, the founders of the Armenian Evangelical Church were looking for a place to really *worship* together, not a place to fulfill secular Armenian needs, nor a place to vindicate their elders' grudges.

One Sunday a few years ago, our church had scheduled a vote on a very controversial issue. The congregation was almost evenly divided, and one vote “yea” or “nay” might make the difference. One of the ladies of our church, a beloved friend of ours, showed up late, and when she arrived she learned that the vote had been postponed. “What?” she said, “You mean I came to church for nothing?”

This attitude acts as a repellent to idealistic young people. If we want to fill our churches with members of the younger generation, then, let us begin by keeping the spiritual values of the church paramount. Let us ask ourselves whether the forty founders of our church would come to worship with our congregation today.

**Second**, the founders of our church were reformers. They saw no obligation to accept traditions simply because they were time-honored. They realized above all that, in order to be vital, a church had to embrace change.

When I was in college, I happened to find in a bookstore a copy of an old book by Harry Emerson Fosdick. I quoted from it earlier. It was titled, *Dear Mr. Brown: Letters to a [Young] Person Perplexed about Religion*.

That book had an enormous influence on me and I sometimes wonder whether, had I not read it, I would today call myself a Christian, or attend a Christian church.

One of Fosdick's chapters asked, “Why join a church?” Fosdick's answer was striking. He told young people “...let me start with the plea that you should join a church, not alone because you need the church but because the church needs you...Mankind needs better churches, and you can help.”

This thought was almost certainly in the mind of the forty founders of our church: that *mankind needs better churches*. I wonder whether it might strike them as absurd to hear a member of an Evangelical Church today urge her child to attend because it is important to maintain the old traditions. The founders of our church were sensitive to what is cherished in religious tradition, of course; they preserved everything of tradition which they could. But they also saw that in religion, tradition could be a strait-jacket.

What would a young person see is he or she attended one of our churches today? Would they see a service that is, in form as well as content, an expression of a restless spirit seeking God? Or would they witness a service that seems achingly familiar? There is irony here: Irony that in a church that was born, in part, to explore dramatically new ways and forms of worshipping God, we now find that the service itself has grown familiar, comfortable, largely unchanging, and sometimes unchallenging.

So let us invite our young people to join our church. But this time, let's invite them not to help us maintain old traditions, but to help us change our church — to continue that process of vital transformation begun 152 years ago.

**Third**, the founders of our Evangelical Church insisted on a church where each member was not just allowed, but encouraged, to find God for himself or herself. A church in which there were no strictures of catechism, nor any royal road to communion with God.

Just how well they succeeded in this aim never fully dawned upon me until my wife and I attended the worldwide celebration

of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Paris in June, 1996.

There I met, for example, a very loving but also very insistent elderly lady from Marseilles who, for all three days of the conference, urged upon me the proposition that I could not have truly experienced the Holy Spirit if I had not yet spoken in tongues. I met so many others, from literally the four corners of the Earth, each of whom experienced the life of Christ in their own way. In that city, suddenly, altogether — liberal and conservative, eastern and western, left-brained and right-brained — there they all were, all praising God together, and all honoring the Armenian Evangelical Church that had brought each of them to a more intimate relationship with God.

And I came back wondering why do we have to go all the way to Paris to feel the power of our church's diversity?

When the congregations of one of our churches sit in their familiar pews, read responsively, sing uniformly, listen respectfully, pray silently, and then eat enthusiastically, something precious has left our Evangelical experience. What is missing is the vision of our precious diversity.

Diversity grows our church in two ways. In a negative way, and a positive way.

Diversity grows our church in a negative way because when we cherish our diversity, we make it clear that our doors are open to everyone, that no one is excluded. If there is an idealistic young person at our doorstep, whose faith is still mixed with two parts doubt, the vision of our diversity will act as a magnet, welcoming that young person, even if he or she did not reach our church doorstep through a well-trod path.

But our diversity also grows our church in a positive way.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein despaired of ever being able to articulate the truths of his philosophy. He said he would never be like the archer, who hit the bull's eye with the arrow. But, he said, perhaps someone, studying where his arrows had landed, so far from the target, would realize suddenly not what he managed to hit, but rather what he had been aiming at.

This is the epiphany that I think so many of us had in Paris. We are alone, each of us, such imperfect vessels of God's for-

## AMAA Activities on the West Coast

The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) Board of Directors meeting in March of each year is traditionally held in California. Related activities are also held in conjunction with the Board meetings. Included in this year's activities were a Sacred Music Concert, a Missions Conference, AMAA Sunday Worship Services and AMAA luncheons.

On Saturday, March 28, 1998, the Board of Directors meeting in Pasadena, CA, was hosted by the Armenian Cilicia Evangelical Church, whose Moderator is Mrs. Angele Zeitountsian. Present at the meeting were members of the Board and some of its officers and administrative staff; AEUNA pastors, local church representatives and missions committee members; local AMAA Chapter representatives; and AMAA instrumentalities and affiliates. The AMAA's President, Mr. Andrew Torigian, chaired the meeting. Reports were heard from officers, committee chairs, administrative staff, and other representatives. Of the many reports heard, one of particular interest was the report of AMAA's Execu-

tive Director, Rev. Movses B. Janbazian, on his most recent trip to Armenia.

Rev. Janbazian gave an extensive update on AMAA projects in Armenia. The AMAA has been active in Armenia since 1988, and since then has spent over \$10 million on various programs and projects. These include Relief, Education, Medical,

Evangelism, Mis-

sions and Publica-

tions.

Those who attended the meeting were treated to a chicken kebab lunch prepared by the host church's Council members. The meal was enjoyed at the newly constructed Darian Fellowship Hall. Mr. Seb Gertmenian, Chairman of the church's Building Committee, welcomed the



*Pastors offering a joint benediction at the conclusion of the AMAA Missions Conference in Los Angeles.*

a statement of faith is a tremendously challenging task. No one realized that more dramatically than the forty founders of our church. But the dialogue which Rev. Doghramji has begun is precisely the kind of exercise which helps to grow a church.

Fourth, the forty founders of our Church were not afraid of Americans. Where would we be today if the forty had feared that, by worshipping with Americans, they would somehow be abandoning their Armenian identity and culture?

Now, I have good news for you. I have learned, from very personal experience, that Americans make excellent Armenians. My wife has been welcomed into the Armenian Evangelical Church with enormous love, and equal doses of respect. This is, I think, the traditional Armenian way of welcoming strangers, and it is an excellent one. Let us grow our churches, then, by throwing open our doors, and our hearts. Let our churches be filled with young people, many of them American sons and daughters—and none of them an "odar." □

giving love. Why has God chosen to reach an old woman in Marseilles through the gift of tongues? Why would God reach Abraham in a command to kill his own son? When we survey the diversity of believers we can gain a sense, not just of what we alone, or even collectively, have come to understand of God's will. When we see all the places where the arrows have landed, we may catch a glimpse, not simply of that portion that we have received through our studies and prayers, but rather, we may catch a sudden glimpse of what God has been aiming at.

Recently, the AEUNA, through a marvelous bulletin by Rev. Dr. Peter Doghramji, challenged Armenian Evangelicals to think about the ways in which a statement of faith can be used to exclude, or to include; to affirm a faith, or simply to avoid controversy. Choosing

Clearly, the young Armenians we want

guests and extended a special word of gratitude to the AMAA Board for providing a construction loan for the building the fellowship hall.

Other activities were also scheduled for that weekend. On Friday evening, March 27, a Missions Conference was sponsored by the AMAA for local evangelical pastors, church leaders, and Missions Committee members. It was held at the C & E Merdinian Armenian Evangelical School of Sherman Oaks, CA. After the dinner, served by the newly-formed Merdinian School La-

dies Auxiliary, chaired by Mrs. Sirvart Mouradian, Rev. Janbazian spoke about the work of the AMAA. He then introduced the evening's speaker, Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, professor emeritus at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. Dr. Bilezikian spoke about the tradition of a local church being the focus of a community.

On Saturday evening, March 28, 1998, a Sacred Music Concert was offered by the Lark Musical Society. This is the third time in as many years that the AMAA has arranged to have Lark provide a quality musical program. AMAA Vice President Mr. George Phillips, Sr., chaired the Special Events Committee, assisted by the Special Event Coordinator, Dr. Nazareth Darakjian. On this 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AMAA, the Lark Chorus and Orchestra, under the capable baton of Maestro Vatsche Barsoumian, performed George Fredric Handel's Messiah. The Gothic architectural style sanctuary of the First Congregational Church of Pasadena was filled to capacity as listeners enjoyed the beautifully orchestrated music and well performed arias by Alenoush Yeghnazar (Soprano), Shoghig Koushakian (Alto), Sonia Brambilla (Alto), Hagop Kupelian (Tenor), Ara Kourouyan (Bass) and Edward Levi (Bass).

On March 29, 1998, AMAA Sunday Morning Worship Services were held at four of the Greater Los Angeles area churches. Rev. Janbazian preached the English and Armenian sermons at the United Armenian Congregational Church (UACC); Mr. Andrew Torigian and Rev. Karl Avakian preached the English and Armenian sermons at the Cilicia Armenian Evangelical Church; Mr. Guevork Guevorkian preached in Armenian at the Armenian Evangelical Church of Hollywood; and Mr. Hagop Manjelikian preached the English and Armenian sermons at the Immanuel Armenian Congregational Church of Downey.

Following the worship services, a joint luncheon was held at the UACC Avazian Fellowship Hall. Pastors and members of the Evangelical churches joined with AMAA Board members to celebrate and give praise to God for the Association's 80 years of mission and service ministry to Armenian communities throughout the world.

Mr. Hagop Manjelikian, on behalf of the AMAA, welcomed the guests and asked Rev. Ron Tovmassian, Senior Pastor of



*Maestro Vatsche Barsoumian conducting the Lark Orchestra & choir during the Special Sacred Music Concert in celebration of AMAA's 80th Anniversary (above). A view of the concert's enthusiastic audience. Participants during AMAA's Mission Conference at the Merdinian School hall.*

UACC and an AMAA Board Member, to offer the invocation. A luncheon featuring chicken kebab was served to over 300 people by the luncheon committee, comprised of volunteers from the various churches under the leadership of Mrs. Laura Zeronian. Following the lunch, the "Master Plan" gospel singers, under the direction of Mr. Arshag Choorookian, performed for the guests. George Phillips, Esq., and Mr. Andrew Torigian offered greetings and remarks. Rev. Janbazian followed with an informative talk on the work of the AMAA and challenged the audience to continue its support of the Association's mission. Rev. Barkev Darakjian concluded the afternoon's activities with the prayer of blessing, followed by the singing of the Hayr Mer and a combined benediction by all the pastors.

Prior to this weekend, Rev Janbazian spent two weeks in California on AMAA visitations. His visits were centered in the San Francisco Bay Area, in Fresno and in Greater Los Angeles. He visited each Armenian Evangelical church in these areas and attended a number of church-related meetings.

On Sunday, March 24, Rev. Janbazian preached at the Calvary Armenian Congregational Church of San Francisco, CA. After the service there was an AMAA benefit luncheon organized by the church's Mission Committee. Rev. Janbazian spoke about the AMAA's mission work and encouraged the participants to pray regularly for, and contribute generously to, the ministry of the Association.

On Sunday, March 22, AMAA Sunday Worship Services were held at the two Evangelical churches in Fresno. Rev. Janbazian was the guest preacher at the First Armenian Presbyterian Church (FAPC) and Mr. Hagop Manjelikian was the guest preacher at Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church (PACC). Members of both congregations attended a joint church luncheon at the FAPC fellowship hall.

The FAPC Missions Committee, under the direction of head chef Brian Bedrossian, prepared a tasty barbecued chicken luncheon. The FAPC's Senior Pastor, Rev. Bernard Guekguezian, began the afternoon's program by introducing AMAA representatives Rev. Janbazian and Mr. Manjelikian. The children's choirs of PACC and FAPC, under the respective leadership of Mrs.



(l to r) AMAA Missions Conference: Pres. Andy Torigian; Conference speaker Dr. Gilbert Bilizikian; AMAA V.P. George Phillips, Sr. Organizers of the Bay Area AMAA Missions Luncheon. Mr. Brian Bedrossian, Chairman of the joint AMAA Missions Luncheon of Fresno; First Armenian Presbyterian Church Children's Choir ministering during the luncheon.



C. & E. Merdinian Ladies Auxiliary, which hosted the AMAA Missions Conference dinner (above). AMAA's Representative in the Bay Area, Mrs. Gladys Shegoian with Karen & Rev. Steve Muncherian; Mrs. Laura Zeronian, chairperson of the L.A. joint Luncheon Committee; Mr. & Mrs. Vartan & Angel Jambazian hosts of the Thousand Oaks Fellowship. A group of AMAA members gathered at the home of Zaven & Sona Khanjian.

Celeste Avedikian and Mrs. Jane Bedrossian, participated by singing selections of gospel songs; Mr. Kevin Kasper, AEYF East Coast Youth Director, and Rev. Karl Ayakian gave testimonies of how the AMAA had affected their lives. The program concluded with Rev. Janbazian challenging those in attendance to continue their support of the work of this one-of-a-kind Armenian mission and service organization that has been providing spiritual and material succor to Armenian communities worldwide since its inception in 1918.

On Wednesday, March 25, The Armenian Evangelical Fellowship of Thousand Oaks celebrated the AMAA's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Rev. Janbazian and Hagop Manjelikian greeted the 30 or more guests at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Vartan & Angele Janbazian of Thousand Oaks. A Lenten lunch was served, after which Rev. Janbazian discussed the work and mission of the AMAA and challenged the friends of AMAA to continue their diligent support of the Association. Rev. Barkev Darakjian's concluding remarks were followed by the Benediction.

It is the tradition of the Armenian Evangelical churches to donate the proceeds from their AMAA Sunday worship service offerings and luncheons to a specific project of the AMAA. This year's proceeds will be used to fund the construction of the sanctuary of the Armenian Evangelical Church of Stepanavan, Armenia.

The Turkish genocide against Armenians in 1915 dispersed the survivors as refugees to other countries. Those fortunate enough to reach the United States found freedom and jobs. Within a few years the Armenian Evangelical community in the U.S. established the AMAA as a way to help their less fortunate countrymen who were refugees in less hospitable lands. They gave from their modest resources to those with little or no resources. Over the years, as Armenians in the U.S. prospered, they increased their support of the AMAA as a means of helping Armenians in other countries who suffered from political instability, poverty and discrimination. The 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AMAA is a tribute to the effort of Armenians of means — however modest — helping to improve the circumstances of Armenians with little or no means and, through spiritual and material support, giving them the hope of a better future.□

## AMAA Executive Director Visits Armenia and France

The worldwide projects and outreach of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) require regular consultation, coordination and evaluation meetings in order to implement these activities in an effective and timely manner. With this need in mind, the AMAA's Executive Director, Rev. Movses B. Janbazian, visited Armenia and France from April 27 — May 7, 1998.

Rev. Janbazian's principal activities in Armenia were: meetings with Rev. Ren<sup>¾</sup>Léonian & Mr. Harout Nercessian, AMAA Representatives in Armenia, and other AMAA staff members to review and evaluate the progress of the Association's programs in Armenia; planning the summer camp programs for disadvantaged children in Armenia, Georgia and Karabagh; reviewing the progress of the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Armenia, which opened its doors last year and currently has 16 students; evaluating available real estate properties suitable for use by the AMAA or by Evangelical churches in Armenia; inspecting the AMAA Health Care Center in Yerevan, which will soon expand its activities to include dental care and family counseling services; chairing the formative meeting of the Board of Managers of the Armenian Evangelical School of Yerevan to review renovation plans, administrative issues and other matters; and paying courtesy calls to Armenia's newly-elected President, Robert Kocharian, and other government and church leaders.

In France, Rev. Janbazian chaired the formative meeting of the Armenian Evangelical Fellowship of Europe. Present were representatives from Armenian Evangelical Churches of Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Belgium, England and France. A constitution and by-laws were proposed and adopted. This historic meeting formalized the growing cooperation among the AMAA, the Armenian Evangelical Union of France, and the Armenian Evangelical communities of other countries in Europe and in Turkey. Rev. Gilbert Léonian of France was appointed coordinator of the Fellowship, which will convene again next May.

*Members of the Armenian Evangelical World Council (above). Mrs. Nelly Missirian cutting the traditional cake of the 70th Anniversary celebration of the Armenian Evangelical Church of Issy-les-Moulineaux. Rev. Bernard Guekguezian (first row, center) with the members of the Central Committee of the Armenian Evangelical Union of France*



While in France, Rev. Janbazian also chaired the biennial meeting of the Armenian Evangelical World Council, which was held on May 5, 1998, at the Armenian Evangelical Church of Issy-les-Moulineaux (Paris). The Council discussed matters of concern to all Armenian Evangelical communities and churches, including the celebration of the approaching 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of Christianity as Armenia's state religion. Rev. Joel Mikaelian of France was elected as the Council's next president.

Rev. Janbazian's other activities in France included: meeting with church representatives from Turkey, Bulgaria, Syria, France, Armenia and Belgium to discuss specific problems and needs facing Armenian Evangelicals in each country; participating in the 68<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Armenian Evangelical Union of France and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Armenian Evangelical Church of Issy-les-Moulineaux; and meetings with the directors of Dorcas Aid International, based in Amsterdam, and Service d'Entraide et de Liaison, based in Paris, two colleague agencies that are cooperating with the AMAA in relief projects for Armenia.

In his concluding remarks, Rev. Janbazian summarized the fruits of his trip as follows: *"Important issues were addressed; new opportunities for expanded mission work were identified; mission partnerships were strengthened; significant funds were raised for AMAA mission projects; and an important Armenian Evangelical unity step was taken with the establishment of the Armenian Evangelical Fellowship of Europe."* □



*Participants in the formative meeting of the Armenian Evangelical Fellowship of Europe (above). Elderly ladies enjoying their luncheon at the AMAA/Espoire-operated Community Food Center in Stepanavan. The members of the Board of Managers of the Evangelical School in Yerevan (left, below). Rev. Movses B. Janbazian with President Robert Kocharian of Armenia.*

## Opening Ceremony of the AMAA office in Ichevan, Armenia

On April 11, 1998, the AMAA opened an office in Ichevan, a city in the northeast corner of Armenia. The Ichevan office is the 7th AMAA regional office in Armenia. The others are in Yerevan, Gumri, Vanatzor, Stepanavan, Stepanagerd (Karabagh), and Goris.

The Mayor of Ichevan, Mr. Armen Ghoularyan, was present at the opening ceremony, as were other city and regional officials. In addition, around 150 adults and children took part in the opening ceremony. The Mayor delivered a speech praising and encouraging the AMAA's mission in Ichevan. AMAA regional representatives Mr. Albert Payatyan (Ichevan), Mr. Samvel Guiragosian (Vanatzor) and Mr. Araig Ochinian (Stepanavan) shared their excitement and happiness on this happy occasion. The AMAA's Representative in Armenia, Rev. René Léonian, greeted all the guests and welcomed them in the name of AMAA. He also thanked the Ichevan authorities for their cooperation and help in establishing the new AMAA office. During the ceremony, the Sunday School children of Ichevan presented the Easter story through a series of skits.

The AMAA's mission in Ichevan and its subsequent establishment of an office there is like an act of providence. It started in 1994, when the first lady of Armenia, Mrs. Ludmila Ter-Petrosian, visited Ichevan with Mrs. Joyce Stein, Mrs. Elizabeth Agbabian and several other women from the United States. The visitors were moved by the poor living conditions of the orphans and the children of impoverished families in Ichevan. The AMAA was asked if it would undertake the sponsorship of at least 100 children from Ichevan and the surrounding villages. Subsequently, AMAA representatives visited Ichevan and held several meetings with the authorities of Ichevan, including Mr. Ghoularyan and Mrs. Gemma Ananian, who pledged to help the AMAA initiate a child sponsorship program. Mr. Albert Payatyan, the head of a regional benevolent organization, helped select 100 children — those who had lost one or both parents or who were desperately poor — for sponsorship. The first food delivery to the families of these children was made in March 1996.



*The Sunday School children of Ichevan participating in the opening ceremonies. The opening ceremony of the AMAA office in Ichevan. (Pictures l to r) Mayor Armen Ghoularyan, Mr. Samuel Giragossian, Rev. René Léonian and Mr. Albert Payatyan*

In addition to the sponsorship program, the AMAA started educational and spiritual activities in Ichevan. In February 1996, the AMAA undertook the sponsorship of Kindergarten No. 1, where a Sunday school was started and Bible study meetings were introduced. During the summer of 1996, AMAA volunteers from the United States served in Ichevan as Christian education instructors. They helped train Sunday School teachers and worked with young people. A group of young adults from Canada, the United States and Lebanon spent two summers in Ichevan working with

older children and young adults to organize Bible study groups and other church-related activities. The AMAA organized a summer camp for disadvantaged children in Ichevan. More than 50 children attended that year, and 70 the following year.

By the end of 1997, it was clear that an office in Ichevan was needed to manage the AMAA's relief activities in the area. The Mayor of Ichevan helped the AMAA staff in Armenia find and renovate the Association's present office, which is located at May 28 street, building 5, Ichevan, Armenia. □

## Anthropologist Bateson and Minister Petrossian at Haigazian University

by A. A. Ekmekji

The Cultural Hour at Haigazian University hosted, on April 15, Mary Catherine Bateson, Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Bateson, who is the daughter of prominent anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, both legends in their own lifetimes, was on a visit to Lebanon accompanied by her husband, Prof. Barkev Kassarjian. She spoke to her audience at Haigazian University on "Individuals Adapting to Cultural Change and Social Discontinuity." Bateson argued that the world is progressing and changing so fast that one could claim that a mother and a child, though bearing the same nationality, could very well belong to different cultures and countries. "Even if war had not taken place in Lebanon", she added, "you still would have been twenty years older today and would have had to look at things differently. When discontinuities and drastic changes are added, the human ability to adapt becomes very difficult unless one is willing to learn. And to learn, we should all admit that there are things we do not know, a readiness to investigate and certainly the risk of committing mistakes". It is only those who have power who are not willing to learn, she said, "For they use their authority to impose their ideas without a readiness to hear the other side".

Bateson proceeded to emphasize the importance of the diversity and plurality of cultures. Cultures are complex. Even societies once considered homogenous, today show points of dissent and difference. The human ability to share these differences as we share the common air could be the future wealth of nations; a wealth as important perhaps as water or oil.

Bateson concluded with this statement: *Education is not how much knowledge we have, but how much knowledge we are willing to acquire.*

On Wednesday, April 22, 1998, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mountainous Karabagh (RMK), Mr. Leonard Petrossian, who was visiting Lebanon, addressed a packed auditorium at Haigazian University. Dr. Ara Sanjian of Haigazian University welcomed the guests on behalf of the University and especially its Department of Armenian Studies. He then invited the Prime Min-

ister to present an update of events taking place in Karabagh.

Mr. Petrossian explained the current military, economic and diplomatic situation in the area. He underlined the basic provisions of the peace treaty that Karabagh would like to negotiate eventually with Azerbaijan and explained the nature of Karabagh's external relations with all its neighbors, and especially with Iran. Afterwards, Dr. Sanjian moderated a question-and-answer session, during which members of the audience inquired about the relations of the authorities in Karabagh with those in neighboring Armenia after the recent presidential elections there; the pressure that has to be exerted on the international community to make the latter respect



*Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson lecturing at HU (above). Prime Minister Leonard Petrossian and Archbishop Barkev Mardirosian of RMK with other guests at the Lecture Hall of HU.*

Karabagh's position; and the use of oil by Azerbaijan as an instrument of political pressure during the ongoing negotiations. The Prime Minister also promised to look into the possibility of establishing educational ties and reciprocal exchanges between Karabagh State University on the one hand and Haigazian University and other institutions of higher learning in the Diaspora on the other. The Head of the Artsakh Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Bishop Barkev Mardirosian, was also invited to briefly address the audience. He spoke on the nature of the conflict in Karabagh, emphasizing that the Armenians of the region were forced to take up arms to defend their right to live freely in the land of their ancestors. Bishop Barkev, together with the Mayor of Shushi, Mr. Sergei Mirzoyan, was accompanying Prime Minister Petrossian during his week-long visit to Lebanon. □

## Rev. & Mrs. John A. Zarifian Honored on Retirement from Pastoral Ministry

**O**n March 29, 1998, the Armenian Euphrates Evangelical Church honored the Rev. and Mrs. John Avedis Zarifian with a Retirement Dinner at the Providence Marriott Hotel in Providence, RI.

After 18 years as pastor of the Armenian Euphrates Evangelical Church, Rev. Zarifian is moving on to resume the missionary work that took him to Argentina 44 years ago. "My years in Providence have been the happiest years of my life," said Rev. Zarifian, "But since my youth, I always have had a great desire to be a missionary and reach out. I have but a few years remaining. I know if I were to stay here a few more years, I would not be able to do that work."

Born in Marseilles, France, a few years after the Armenian Genocide in 1915, in which both his parents were orphaned, Rev. Zarifian served as pastor of churches in Argentina, New Hampshire and Montreal, and as an itinerant evangelist in the Middle East, before coming to Providence in 1980. "My parents," said Rev. Zarifian, "lost not just their parents in the 1915 genocide, but all members of their respective families. My mother was only 7 years old at the time, and my father was 13. They went to orphanages, where they were taken care of by American missionaries who taught them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

When asked about his decision to become a pastor, Rev. Zarifian replied, "I was 18 years old when I decided. When I was 24, the Armenian Evangelical Union of France decided to send me to Argentina, because there was a church in Buenos Aires that needed a pastor. I started there in 1952, the same year I married Lois, whose father was a pastor from Lebanon who had been invited to become pastor of another church in Buenos Aires."

An achievement that has given a great deal of satisfaction to Rev. Zarifian is the establishment of bonds of friendship with other church leaders in Providence, including those representing Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic churches. The clergy of these churches, says Rev. Zarifian, "have been not only united in spirit, but we have been friends. We have this bond of friendship that is very strong. In fact, when Fa-

ther Tashjian spoke about my departure, he said I was instrumental in bringing unity to our community. I say this just to emphasize the spirit of our relationship, which has always been one of respect, love and friendship between the churches and their clergy."

The Retirement Dinner was a joyous occasion. Over 350 people gathered to honor Rev. Zarifian and his wife Lois and to recognize their 44 years of dedication and faithful service to the Lord.

The Banquet Chairperson was Mrs. Gail Bartigian Bilezerian and Master of Ceremonies was Deacon Carlos Taraktzian. Words of greetings were presented by Rev. Dr. H. Daehler Hayes, RI Conference Minister of United Church of Christ; Rev. Peter John, Former Pastor of United Methodist Church; Rev. Fr. Haik Donikian of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church; Rev. Dr. Mesrob Tashjian of St. Vartanantz Armenian Apostolic Church; and The Very Rev. Fr. Barret Yeretzian of the Diocese of New York.

Plaques were presented to the Zarifians by Keith Bilezerian on behalf of the Armenian Euphrates Evangelical Church and by Ara Balian on behalf of the Armenian Missionary Association of America and the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America.

Congregational presentations were made by William Tatewosian, Chairman of the Church Council and by Melanie Taraktzian, Elizabeth Wocik, Deacon Daniel Beardsley and Melvin Bilezerian.

A musical program was provided by Professor Hagop Anmahian, a virtuoso on the violin.

The Congregation expressed their love and admiration to Rev. Zarifian and his wife, Lois, by including the following printed statement in the banquet program: "We gather today to extend a fond farewell to Badveli as he embarks on the retirement years of his life. He has served in the Ministry for forty-four years. Badveli, together



Rev. John and Lois Zarifian

with his wife, Lois, shared eighteen years with our congregation and community and we are grateful for their faithful and dedicated service. May God richly bless them both in the future. Badveli and Lois — God be with you until we meet again."

Lois Zarifian expressed her gratitude and love to the congregation and reaffirmed her dedication to supporting Rev. Zarifian in his ministry.

Rev. Zarifian's closing remarks thanked the congregation and the community for their love and support over the past 18 years. He recognized many individuals and organizations for their contribution. Looking ahead, he pointed out the need to "get the new generation (of Armenians) to keep in touch with its past and to appreciate its heritage... We really have to be courageous and try to find the best way to teach the new generation what we know about the past. We have to help them know that they, too, have a responsibility to carry on, aware of how our people have suffered. And they have to know that what's best in this blessed country is to be a good citizen."

The evening's event was a heart-warming expression of love and appreciation, and it ended with the singing of the *Hayr Mer* and a benediction by Rev. Zarifian. □

## Rev. & Mrs. Vartan Hartunian's Forty Years of Pastoral Ministry Celebrated

**T**he countless individuals whose lives have been touched by the ministry of the Rev. Varian Hartunian had an opportunity to express their appreciation at a banquet on May 3 at the Burlington Marriott hotel.

The event celebrated 40 years of ministry by the Rev. Hartunian, who at age 83 is stepping down as pastor of the First Armenian church in Belmont, Mass. As a parade of Armenian and non-Armenian leaders approached the podium to offer their tributes to the pastor (and also to his faithful partner of 53 years, "pampish" Grace), it was clear that Rev. Hartunian's services have gone far beyond the traditional role of an Armenian Evangelical minister.

The Rev. Hartunian was cited for his leadership in human rights issues, ranging from his participation in civil rights marches in the South and his opposition to the Vietnam war to his campaign for recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

A Genocide survivor who has seen his book, *Neither to Laugh Nor To Weep*, a translation of his father's memoirs, become a best seller now going into its third edition, Rev. Hartunian has been a survivor in other ways as well. Not only did he overcome a rare and debilitating illness three years ago, but Rev. Karl Vartan Avakian, representing the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America, reported that his research has shown that no Protestant Armenian pastor "has lasted for 40 years in a single church in the United States."

Former Massachusetts Governor Dukakis and his wife Kitty described Rev. Hartunian as an eloquent and forceful spokesman regarding the significance of the Genocide. "He has been my mentor and my teacher about the Armenian Genocide," Mrs. Dukakis said. She described Rev. Hartunian's book as having a profound influence in her life, and expressed disappointment that the US Holocaust Museum in Washington did not contain more material about the Armenian Genocide. A member of the Museum board, Mrs. Dukakis stated that she "hopes soon there will be more."

Protestant leaders, such as the Rev.



Rev. Vartan and Grace Hartunian

Jonathan Morgan of the Plymouth Congregational Church, expressed admiration for the strong and active congregation of the First Armenian Church and praised Rev. Hartunian's leadership as former chairman of the Belmont Religious Council in reaching out and bringing in as members the local Jewish and Unitarian communities.

Parishioner Carol Nahigian, speaking for the faithful of the First Armenian Church, spoke of the many ways the pastor has supported the members of the congregation and its many organizations.

Dr. Earl A. Grollman, author and rabbi emeritus of Beth El Temple, described parallels in the historical experiences of the Jews and Armenians and spoke of his close collaboration with Rev. Hartunian to express the importance of learning from the lessons of the past.

Haig Der Manuelian, president of the Armenian Library and Museum of America, and Manoog S. Young, board chairman of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, paid tribute to Rev. Hartunian's participation and leadership in the broader Armenian-American community. The Reverends Torkom Hagopian and Dajad Davidian (the latter in New York to welcome the Catholicos) was represented by

his wife Rosemarie) cited Hartunian's broad ecumenical vision as well as his courage of conviction and commitment to making the Christian faith relevant in contemporary society.

Political accolades were part of the program as well. State Senator Warren Tolman presented a Resolution from the Massachusetts Senate recognizing Pastor Vartan's contributions to the community, while State Representative Ann Paulson brought greetings from the Massachusetts House (Rep. Rachel Kaprielian was also present). The next day, Belmont Town Meeting issued a proclamation congratulating Rev. Hartunian and thanking him for his dedicated service to the Belmont community.

A new pastor, Rev. Mihran Kupeyan, has been engaged to lead the First Armenian Church congregation.

But no one expects Rev. Hartunian to fade away, just because he is stepping down as pastor of the Belmont church. On the contrary, as streams of parishioners stopped by to say goodbye, Rev. Hartunian said he plans to focus on writing and lecturing in retirement while Mrs. Hartunian offered cheerful words of consolation. "Be happy, because we are starting a new life," she said.

— The Armenian Mirror Spectator

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## ***Eleven Things to Remember as You plan ...for Your Future and Ours***

### **1. Make an Estate Plan**

An estate plan helps you provide for yourself and your loved ones in the future. Many people also wish to remember their favorite charities.

A will or other legal agreement, such as a living trust, is necessary in order to be sure your wishes will be carried out. Otherwise, state law gives your property automatically to your nearest relatives (even if your nearest are distant).

### **2. Consult an Attorney**

There is no substitute for the advice of an attorney when making a will or trust. Even wishes regarding a modest estate should be set out in the proper legal language. Your attorney will have suggestions that can reduce your estate taxes, probate costs, and other legal expense.

When you choose an attorney, he or she should be one who is knowledgeable in the area of estate planning. Discuss fees ahead of time so you will know the approximate cost.

### **3. Update your Estate Plan Regularly**

Many occurrences can make your will and other plans obsolete practically overnight: changes in your family (marriages, births, deaths); variations in the nature and value of your property; and changes in state and federal laws.

Moving to another state may call for a review of your estate plan. Changes in your attitude toward people and organizations or institutions may also influence your priorities.

### **4. Name an Alternate**

Every will drawn by an attorney names an executor. It is wise to pick one who is knowledgeable in managing finances. An alternate executor should also be named, in case your first choice is unable to serve. Otherwise, the court may simply name someone you might not have selected.

In the case of a trust, provisions should be made for alternate or successor trustee.

### **5. Remember the Significance of Memorials**

If you want to honor the memory of a special friend or loved one, consider making a memorial gift in your will, trust, retirement plans, life insurance, or other long-range plans. Your advisors can assist you in arranging such a memorial.

*(Continued inside of the back cover)*

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